How We Honor:
Jewish Practices of Dying, Death, and Mourning

Materials

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Visiting the Sick, Companioning the Dying

אָמַר רַבִּי אַחָא בַּר חֲנִינָא: כָּל הַמְבַקֵּר חוֹלֶה,
נוֹטֵל אֶחָד מִשִּׁשִּׁים בְּצַעֲרוֹ.

Rabbi Acha says: whoever visits the sick
relieves one-sixtieth of their suffering.

(Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 39b)

Some principles from the *Shulchan Arukh* about the *mitzvah* of *bikkur cholim,* the visiting of the sick, include:

— Inner circle visits first, then others after three days, unless the illness grave. Then all can visit right away.

— We don't sit on the bed or on a chair but sit in a *tallit* on the floor at the foot of the bed, since the Shekhinah is above the sick person's head.

— We don't visit in the early morning hours when the illness might feel lighter and we don't visit in the late night hours when the illness might feel heavier.

— If you pray for the person's health in their presence, you may do so in any language. But outside of their presence Hebrew is advised. Also, include all who are sick among the House of Israel in your prayer. ("Grant healing to So-and-So, among all the sick of the People of Israel.")

— With certain conditions (intestinal conditions, eye disorders, mental disorders, or those with difficulty speaking), we don't visit the person, but visit the house to inquire about them.

— It is a *mitzvah* to visit non-Jews as well.

— Changing the sick person's name might temper the harsh decree of illness.

In Anticipation of One's Own Death

רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר: שׁוּב יוֹם אֶחָד לִפְנֵי מִיתָתֶךָ.
שָׁאֲלוּ תַּלְמִידָיו אֶת רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר:
וְכִי אָדָם יוֹדֵעַ אֵיזֶהוּ יוֹם יָמוּת?
אָמַר לָהֶן: וְכָל שֶׁכֵּן, יָשׁוּב הַיּוֹם, שֶׁמָּא יָמוּת לְמָחָר,
וְנִמְצָא כָּל יָמָיו בִּתְשׁוּבָה.

Rabbi Eliezer would say, "Repent the day before your death." His students asked, "How do we know on which day we will die?" He replied, "Then repent today, lest you die tomorrow, and you will live all your days in *teshuvah*."

(Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 153a)

It is custom to recite a deathbed *vidui* or confession before one dies. It is also desirable to die with the words of the *Shema* on one's lips. Here is an interpretive rendering of the deathbed *vidui* by Rabbi Rami Shapiro. I find that it is a powerful experience for family members to read this on behalf of someone who cannot speak.

I acknowledge before the Source of all
That life and death are not in my hands.
Just as I did not choose to be born,
so I do not choose to die.
May it come to pass that I may be healed
but if death is my fate,
then I accept it with dignity
and the loving calm
of one who knows the way of all things.

May my death be honorable,
and may my life be a healing memory
for those who know me.

May my loved ones think well of me
and may my memory bring them joy.

From all those I may have hurt,
I ask forgiveness.
Upon all who have hurt me,
I bestow forgiveness.

As a wave returns to the ocean,
so I return to the Source from which I came.

Shema Yisrael Adonai Elohenu Adonai Echad.
Hear, O Israel,
that which we call God is Oneness itself.
Blessed is the Way of God,
The Way of Life and Death,
of coming and going,
of meeting and loving,
now and forever.
As I was blessed with the one,
so now am I blessed with the other.
Shalom. Shalom. Shalom.

Reaching the Moment of Death

אֵין מְעַמְּצִין אֶת הַמֵּת בְּשַׁבָּת, וְלֹא בְחֹל עִם יְצִיאַת נָפֶשׁ.
וְהַמְעַמֵּץ עִם יְצִיאַת נָפֶשׁ, הֲרֵי זֶה שׁוֹפֵךְ דָּמִים׃

Whoever closes the eyes of the dying in the moment of their death is likened to a murderer.

(Mishnah Shabbat 23:5)

The prohibition on "closing the eyes of the dying," has evolved to be a prohibition on planning funerals or other such activity while the loved one is still alive. The principle seems to be that while the person is alive, one focuses on them in their aliveness.

This principle discourages talking across the sick person or talking to doctors as if the dying person is not in the room. While the person lives, even if they are not conscious, they are to be addressed and treated as a living person.

Have you heard the old joke about the kugel? It goes like this. An old man is dying. He smells a wonderful smell and asks his daughter to find out what it is. She comes back and says, "Ma is making kugel." He says, "It smells so good. Go tell Ma I want a piece." She goes and comes back a few minutes later and says, "Ma says it's for after."

My own father, when he was dying, wanted us to leave his bedside clean the house so it would be ready for *shivah*. We declined.

Upon death, and the In-Between Time

רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר אוֹמֵר,
אַל תְּרַצֶּה אֶת חֲבֵרְךָ בִּשְׁעַת כַּעֲסוֹ,
וְאַל תְּנַחֲמֶנּוּ בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁמֵּתוֹ מֻטָּל לְפָנָיו׃

Rabbi Shimon says:
Do not try to appease your friend while they are angry,
and do not try to console your friend
while their dead still lies before them.

(Mishnah Pirkei Avot 4:18)

Kri'ah. When a loved one dies, it is a complicated moment of deep sorrow and possibly some relief if the illness has been long and hard. The custom of *kri'ah* (קריעה) – tearing one's garment – is offered as a way to give physical form to a moment of overwhelming emotion. (The custom has evolved, or devolved, into the tearing of a black ribbon at the funeral.)

Barukh Dayan HaEmet. At the moment of death, or of hearing of the death, one says, *Barukh Atah Adonai Dayan HaEmet* – blessed is YHWH, the true judge. This blessing is one of resignation and surrender: we do not know the reasons behind life and death, we barely have a sense of the mechanics of them; all we can do is accept.

In-Between Time. The moment of death ushers in, for the next of kin, a period called *aninut* (אנינות). This is an in-between status. They are not yet considered mourners. They are still in service to the *met* (מת) or *metah* (מתה) (i.e. the deceased), seeing to the details of burial.

Taharah and Shmirah. During this time before burial, which is traditionally very short, the customs of *taharah* (טהרה) and *shmirah* (שמירה) are observed. The *met* or *metah* are not left alone, and in *taharah* they are still addressed as if living – asked for forgiveness, for instance.

The seven days of *shivah* (שבעה) do not kick in yet.

Bewailing and Eulogizing: The Funeral

וַתָּמָת שָׂרָה בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבַּע הִוא חֶבְרוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן
וַיָּבֹא אַבְרָהָם לִסְפֹּד לְשָׂרָה וְלִבְכֹּתָהּ׃

And Sarah died in Kiryat Arba which is Hebron
in the land of Canaan. And Abraham came
to lament Sarah and weep for her.

(Genesis 23:2)

Quick Burial. It is Jewish tradition to bury as quickly as possible. A long period of *aninut* can be very difficult for families. Until there is a disposition of the body, the mourning cannot properly begin. It is the burial that triggers *shiv'ah.* That is when the next of kin stop being in service to the deceased an come to be witnessed as *avelim* (אבלים) or "mourners" (although the term has more of a quality of "orphan" – it is a status that describes you and how you have changed in your loss).

Special Issues with Cremation. For those who choose cremation, there can be an uncomfortable waiting period before the body of the *met/ah* is cremated, which can leave the family in an emotional limbo. I encourage families to use the Pleasant Hills Mortuary or another local mortuary where they understand the importance of speed. I also encourage families to schedule a funeral service with the same rapidity they would with a traditional burial so that we can feel right shifting into *shivah.*

Funeral Service. A service can be done at the graveside or in a chapel or at the synagogue. It can have music and poetry. At minimum it includes Psalm 23, a eulogy, the El Malei Rachamim prayer, and the recitation of the Mourners' Kaddish by the next of kin. Those prayers are included at the end of this document. They both serve the function of *iluy neshamah,* helping the soul of the deceased rise up into the heavenly realms.

Coffin vs. Green; Streetclothes vs. Shroud. Jewish tradition pushes for a quick return to the earth from which we came. Therefore there is a Jewish preference for burial in a simple pine box (in the United States) or simply in a shroud (in Israel). The requirement of a cement vault is often articulated as a health regulation; typically this is not true but is a cemetery-specific practice.

Burial and Leaving the Cemetery. It is custom for those attending the burial to assist by helping to fill the grave with earth. This is the last service we offer the loved one; considered a holy act because the loved one cannot offer thanks. There are some customs to physically express reluctance in how one uses the shovel. Also, after adding earth, one plants the shovel back in the ground for the next person rather than handing it directly. When leaving the cemetery, it is customary to wash one's hands.

Shiv'ah

> וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד-גֹּרֶן הָאָטָד אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן וַיִּסְפְּדוּ-שָׁם מִסְפֵּד
> גָּדוֹל וְכָבֵד מְאֹד וַיַּעַשׂ לְאָבִיו אֵבֶל שִׁבְעַת יָמִים׃
>
> When they came to Goren ha-Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they held there a very great and solemn lamentation; and [Joseph] observed a mourning period of seven (*shiv'ah*) days for his father.
>
> (Genesis 50:10)

Shiv'ah is Hebrew for "seven." It refers to the period of seven days beginning when one returns home from the funeral. The word does not in itself suggest any gatherings or prayer services.

Our tradition is that the grieving family stays home for a week. A *shivah minyan* is a gathering of ten or more people to allow the *avelim* the opportunity to recite *kaddish* without having to leave their home.

It is customary to receive condolence calls during *shivah,* except on Shabbat or certain holidays. It is reasonable to limit the hours for visits so the family is not overwhelmed. In theory the mourners should just be allowed to *be.* Others should take care of making sure there is food for the family and for visitors – including handling setup and cleanup. Taking that role is a great service to offer. If *shivah* is beginning immediately after the burial, it is good to have someone back at the *shivah* house already, setting up food. It is the custom that the mourners sit down to eat first, beginning with a hardboiled egg.

Visitors are not there to entertain the mourners. If the mourners wish to chat, visitors may chat with them. If the mourners want to sit in silence, the visitors are to hold silence too.

Customarily the door is left open during *shivah* hours so that no one has to knock, potentially forcing the mourners to get up to open the door and greet. It is also customary not to take food out of a *shivah* house.

At the end of *shivah,* the mourners customarily emerge from the house and take a walk around the block.

Shloshim, Shanah, Unveiling

וַיִּבְכּוּ֨ בְנֵֽי יִשְׂרָאֵ֜ל אֶת-מֹשֶׁ֗ה בְּעַרְבֹ֥ת מוֹאָב֙ שְׁלֹשִׁ֣ים י֔וֹם
וַיִּתְּמ֕וּ יְמֵ֖י בְּכִ֣י אֵבֶ֑ל מֹשֶֽׁה׃

The Israelites wept for Moshe in the plains of Moab for thirty (*shloshim*) days. Then the period of wailing and mourning for Moshe came to an end.

(Deuteronomy 34:8)

Shloshim. Besides the week of *shivah,* our tradition designates the first 30 days following burial as another meaningful period of time during which mourners might return to work but hold back from big public events, social gatherings, and entertainments. This is to help maintain a "fence" around mourners that allows them to continue their mourning without being dragged back into the full distractions of daily life. Some people continue to wear their *kri'ah* ribbon in order to be visible in their mourning. The obligation of saying *kaddish* continues during this month. There are many customs to mark the end of *shloshim.*

Tradition suggests that during *shloshim* one may comfort the mourner but not ask how they are. Only after 30 days does one ask, "How are you?" Then one continues on to offer comfort.

In historic Jewish practice, the end of *shloshim* is the end of the mourning period for spouses, siblings, and children. Mourning continues for the loss of one's parents. In modern practice, most people observe a year for all first-degree relatives. Our ancient rabbinic sources do have a concern about over-grieving. The Shulchan Arukh says (Yoreh Deah 394): "Whoever grieves beyond the prescribed time is grieving for something else."

Shanah. Mourning continues for another eleven months beyond *shloshim,* to total one year (*shanah*). Again, traditionally this is just for mourning one's parents. In modern practice, it is for mourning any first-degree relative. During these additional eleven months, mourners might continue to hold back from public gatherings and entertainments, although it is permitted to attend weddings and *b'nei mitzvah.* The obligation of reciting the mourner's *kaddish* continues during this time, as do the *mitzvot* of study and giving charity in honor of the deceased.

Unveiling. There is a traditional obligation to erect a *matzevah* or monument/gravestone in honor of the deceased. An unveiling ceremony, however, is somewhat new-fangled, originating in the US. The unveiling happens after *shloshim,* most typically in the month before the first *yahrzeit.* A rabbi is not required and there is no special liturgy, although recitation of *El Malei Rachamim* and *Kaddish* are customary.

Yahrzeit and Yizkor

Yahrzeit refers to the anniversary of an individual's death according to the Hebrew calendar. Observances for a *yahrzeit* include lighting a 24-hour memorial candle and reciting *kaddish* with a *minyan*. In synagogue settings, names of people with a close *yahrzeit* are recited before the mourner's *kaddish.*

One is only under obligation to mark the *yahrzeit* of first-degree relatives – parents, siblings, spouses, and children. One is not under obligation to remember more distant relatives, including grandparents. The idea here is that once all who are under the *yahrzeit* obligation have themselves died, the deceased is released from the tether and burden of our memory and ritual. A rabbinic saying says גזירה על המת שישתכח מן הלב. *G'zeyrah al hamet sheyishtakach min halev.* "It is decreed that the dead will be forgotten from the heart." The meaning of this is that it is natural for the awareness of grief to lessen over time; it is the natural lifecycle of death for one to eventually be forgotten. There is no shame or failure in this. There is no disloyalty in not marking the *yahrzeit* of grandparents or aunts and uncles or cousins. One is not forbidden from remembering them and speaking of them fondly.

Yizkor refers to a ritual of collective mourning on Yom Kippur and, in some communities, at the end of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot, for our first-degree relatives. On these days one can light a 24-hour candle at home. Besides recitation of El Malei Rachamim and Mourners' Kaddish, there is a Yizkor prayer:

> *Yizkor Elohim et-nishmat _____ she-halakh/halkhah l'olamo/l'olamah. Ana t'hi nafsho/nafshah tz'rurah bitz'ror hachayim ut'hi m'nuchato/m'nuchatah kavod. S'va s'machot et panekha n'imot biminkha netzach. Amen.*
>
> May God remember the soul of _____ who went to his/her place of eternal rest. Please let his/her soul be bound up with the living in the continuum of life, and may his/her rest be honorable. Grant her abundant joy in your presence, and sweet pleasures at your right hand for eternity. Amen.

Referencing the deceased. When referring to someone no longer living, one of several phrases may be said following their name:

- *Zikhrono/zikhronah livrakhah* – "May his/her name be for a blessing."
- *Yehi zikhro/zikhrah barukh/b'rukhah* – "May his/her memory be blessed."
- *Zikhron tzadik/tzadikah livrakhah* – "May the memory of this righteous person be for a blessing."
- *Alav/aleyha hashalom* – "Peace be upon him/her."

El Malei Rachamim (Feminine)

אֵל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים שׁוֹכֵן בַּמְּרוֹמִים. הַמְצֵא מְנוּחָה נְכוֹנָה תָּחַת כַּנְפֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה. בְּמַעֲלוֹת קְדוֹשִׁים וּטְהוֹרִים כְּזוֹהַר הָרָקִיעַ מַזְהִירִים אֶת נִשְׁמַת יַקִּירָתֵנוּ _____ בַּת _____ שֶׁהָלְכָה לְעוֹלָמָהּ. בְּגַן עֵדֶן תְּהֵא מְנוּחָתָהּ. אָנָּא בַּעַל הָרַחֲמִים הַסְתִּירֶהָ בְּסֵתֶר כְּנָפֶיךָ לְעוֹלָמִים. וּצְרוֹר בִּצְרוֹר הַחַיִּים אֶת נִשְׁמָתָהּ. יְיָ הוּא נַחֲלָתָהּ וְתָנוּחַ בְּשָׁלוֹם עַל מִשְׁכָּבָהּ. וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן׃

El Malei Rachamim shokhen bam'romim: ham'tzei m'nuchah n'khonah tachat kanfei haSh'khinah. B'ma'alot k'doshim ut'horim k'zohar harakia maz'hirim et nishmat yakiratenu _____ bat _____ shehal'khah l'olamah. B'Gan Eden t'hei m'nuchatah. Ana Ba'al HaRachamim hastireha b'seter k'nafeykha l'olamim. Utz'ror bitz'ror hachayim et nishmatah. Adonai hu nachalatah v'tanuach b'shalom al mishkavah. V'nomar: Amen.

God full of mercy who dwells on high, grant perfect rest under the wings of Your Divine Presence, Your Shekhinah, in the lofty heights of the holy and pure who shine as the brightness of the heavens, to the soul of our beloved _____, who has gone to her eternal home. May she rest in Paradise. Please, Merciful One, care for her under the shelter of Your wings for all time and bind her soul in the bond of everlasting life. Adonai is her inheritance. May she rest in peace. And let us say: Amen.

El Malei Rachamim (Masculine)

אֵל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים שׁוֹכֵן בַּמְּרוֹמִים. הַמְצֵא מְנוּחָה נְכוֹנָה תָּחַת כַּנְפֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה. בְּמַעֲלוֹת קְדוֹשִׁים וּטְהוֹרִים כְּזוֹהַר הָרָקִיעַ מַזְהִירִים אֶת נִשְׁמַת יַקִּירָנוּ_____ בֶּן _____ שֶׁהָלַךְ לְעוֹלָמוֹ, בְּגַן עֵדֶן תְּהֵא מְנוּחָתוֹ. אָנָּא בַּעַל הָרַחֲמִים הַסְתִּירֵהוּ בְּסֵתֶר כְּנָפֶיךָ לְעוֹלָמִים. וּצְרוֹר בִּצְרוֹר הַחַיִּים אֶת נִשְׁמָתוֹ. יְיָ הוּא נַחֲלָתוֹ. וְיָנוּחַ בְּשָׁלוֹם עַל מִשְׁכָּבוֹ. וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן׃

El Malei Rachamim shokhen bam'romim. Hamtzei m'nuchah n'khonah tachat kanfei haSh'khinah. B'ma'alot k'doshim ut'horim k'zohar harakia maz'hirim et nishmat yakirenu _____ ben _____ she-halakh l'olamo, b'Gan Eden tehei m'nuchato. Ana Ba'al Harachamim hastirehu b'seter k'nafeykha l'olamim. Utz'ror bitz'ror hachayim et nishmato. Adonai hu nachalato. V'yanuach b'shalom al mishkavo. V'nomar: Amen.

God full of mercy who dwells on high, grant perfect rest under the wings of Your Divine Presence, Your Shekhinah, in the lofty heights of the holy and pure who shine as the brightness of the heavens, to the soul of our beloved _____, who has gone to his eternal rest. May he rest in Paradise. Please, Merciful One, care for him under the shelter of Your wings for all time and bind his soul in the bond of everlasting life. Adonai is his inheritance. May he rest in peace. And let us say: Amen.

Mourners' Kaddish

יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא.
בְּעָלְמָא דִּי בְרָא כִרְעוּתֵהּ, וְיַמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתֵהּ
בְּחַיֵּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל.
בַּעֲגָלָא וּבִזְמַן קָרִיב
וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן׃

Yitgadal v'yitkadash shmeh raba.
B'alma di v'ra chir'uteh, v'yamlich malchuteh
B'chayeichon uv'yomeichon uv'chayei d'chol
Beyt Yisrael. Ba'agala uvizman kariv
V'imru: Amen.

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלַם וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמַיָּא׃

Y'hei sh'meh raba m'varach l'alam ul'almei almaya.

יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח, וְיִתְפָּאַר וְיִתְרוֹמַם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא
וְיִתְהַדַּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל שְׁמֵהּ דְּקֻדְשָׁא
בְּרִיךְ הוּא
לְעֵלָּא מִן כָּל בִּרְכָתָא וְשִׁירָתָא,
תֻּשְׁבְּחָתָא וְנֶחֱמָתָא, דַּאֲמִירָן בְּעָלְמָא,
וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן׃

Yitbarach v'yishtabach, v'yitpa'ar v'yit'romam
v'yitnasei
V'yit'hadar v'yit'aleh v'yit'halal shmeh dukud'sha
B'rich hu
L'ela min kol birchata v'shirata,
Tushb'chata v'nechemata, da'amiran b'alma,
V'imru: Amen.

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים
עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל,
וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן׃

Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya v'chayim
Aleynu v'al kol Yisrael,
V'imru: Amen.

עֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בִּמְרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם
עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל,
וְעַל כֹּל יוֹשְׁבֵי תֵבֵל
וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן׃

Oseh shalom bim'romav hu ya'aseh shalom
Aleynu v'al kol Yisrael,
V'al kol yoshvei tevel
V'imru: Amen.

May the Great Name be magnified and sanctified in this world that was created by Divine will and which is inherently Divine turf. Now, forever and in our day, and let us say *Amen.* May the Great Name be blessed now and always. May the name of the Holy One, Blessed Be, be blessed and extolled and marveled at and raised up high and be splendid and be praised. For the Divine is higher than all blessings and songs and praises and consolations that can be uttered in this world, and let us say *Amen.* Let there be great peace from heaven for us and all of our people, and let us say *Amen.* May the One who makes the ingredients of peace help us be the agents of peace for us and all of the people Israel and everyone who dwells on this earth, and let us say *Amen.*

Bedtime Shema

הֲרֵינִי מוֹחֵל לְכָל מִי שֶׁהִכְעִיס וְהִקְנִיט אוֹתִי, אוֹ שֶׁחָטָא כְּנֶגְדִּי בֵּין בְּגוּפִי בֵּין בְּמָמוֹנִי בֵּין בִּכְבוֹדִי בֵּין בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר לִי, בֵּין בְּאֹנֶס, בֵּין בְּרָצוֹן, בֵּין בְּשׁוֹגֵג, בֵּין בְּמֵזִיד, בֵּין בְּדִבּוּר בֵּין בְּמַעֲשֶׂה, בְּמַחֲשָׁבָה בֵּין בְּהֶרְהוּר, בֵּין בְּגִלְגּוּל זֶה בֵּין בְּגִלְגּוּל אַחֵר, לְכָל בַּר יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְלֹא יֵעָנֵשׁ שׁוּם אָדָם בְּסִבָּתִי. יִהְיוּ רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהַי וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי, שֶׁלֹּא אֶחֱטָא עוֹד, וּמַה שֶׁחָטָאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ מְחוֹק בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הָרַבִּים, אֲבָל לֹא עַל יְדֵי יִסּוּרִים וָחֳלָיִים רָעִים. יִהְיוּ לְרָצוֹן אִמְרֵי פִי וְהֶגְיוֹן לִבִּי לְפָנֶיךָ, יְיָ צוּרִי וְגֹאֲלִי.

I hereby forgive anyone who has angered or injured me, or sinned against, damaging my body or my livelihood or my honor or anything else of mine. Whether violently or intentionally or accidentally. Whether by speech or deed or thought or imagination. Whether in this incarnation or another. May no one be punished on my account. And any sins I have committed before You – erase them in Your great mercy, but not by means of sufferings or hard illnesses. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable before You, my Rock and my Redeemer.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ רוּחַ הָעוֹלָם, הַמַּפִּיל חֶבְלֵי שֵׁנָה עַל עֵינָי וּתְנוּמָה עַל עַפְעַפָּי. וִיהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהַי וֵאלֹהֵי דּוֹרוֹתָי, שֶׁתַּשְׁכִּיבֵנִי לְשָׁלוֹם וְתַעֲמִידֵנִי לְשָׁלוֹם, וְאַל יְבַהֲלוּנִי רַעְיוֹנַי וַחֲלוֹמוֹת רָעִים וְהַרְהוּרִים רָעִים, וּתְהֵא מִטָּתִי שְׁלֵמָה לְפָנֶיךָ, וְהָאֵר עֵינַי פֶּן אִישַׁן הַמָּוֶת, כִּי אַתָּה הַמֵּאִיר לְאִישׁוֹן בַּת עָיִן. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, הַמֵּאִיר לָעוֹלָם כֻּלּוֹ בִּכְבוֹדוֹ.

Blessed are You, Adonai, our God, Great Spirit, who cast the bonds of sleep on my eyes and slumber on my eyelids. May it be Your will, Adonai, my God and God of my ancestors, to lay me down in peace and to raise me up in peace. May my busy thoughts and bad dreams not frighten me. May my bed be one of wholeness before you. Bring light to my eyes tomorrow that I may not yet sleep the sleep of death, for you are illuminate the pupil of the eye. Blessed are You, Adonai, who illuminates the whole world with Your glory.

אֵל מֶלֶךְ נֶאֱמָן.

שְׁמַע | יִשְׂרָאֵל, יְיָ | אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְיָ | אֶחָד׃

Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheynu Adonai Echad.
Hear O Israel, Adonai our God is One.

Healing Prayers

1. Mi Sheberakh

מִי שֶׁבֵּרַךְ דּוֹרוֹתֵינוּ אַבְרָהָם, יִצְחָק, וְיַעֲקֹב, שָׂרָה, רִבְקָה, רָחֵל, וְלֵאָה, הוּא יְבָרֵךְ אֶת הַחוֹלָה _____ בַּת _____. הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא יִמְלֵא רַחֲמִים עָלֶיהָ לְהַחֲלִימָהּ וּלְרַפְּאתָהּ וּלְהַחֲזִיקָהּ וּלְהַחֲיוֹתָהּ, וְיִשְׁלַח לָהּ מְהֵרָה רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם לְכָל אֵבָרֶיהָ וּלְכָל גִּידֶיהָ בְּתוֹךְ שְׁאָר חוֹלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, רְפוּאַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ וּרְפוּאַת הַגּוּף, הַשְׁתָּא בַּעֲגָלָא וּבִזְמַן קָרִיב. וְנאמַר אָמֵן׃

Mi sheberakh doroteynu Avraham, Yitzchak, v'Ya'akov, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, v'Leah, hu y'varekh et hacholah _____ ben / bat __(mother's name or both parents)__. HaKadosh Barukh Hu yimalei rachamim alav / aleyha, l'hachlimo/ah ul'rapoto/ah ul'hachaziko/ah, ul'hachayoto/ah, v'yishlach lo / lah m'herah r'fuah sh'lemah min hashamayim l'khol evarav / evareyha ul'khol gidav / gideyha b'tokh sh'ar cholei Yisrael, r'fuat hanefesh ur'fuat haguf, hashta ba'agala uviz'man kariv. V'nomar amen.

May the One who blessed our ancient ones – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah – bless _____ ben / bat __*(mother's name or both parents)*__. May the Holy Blessed One be filled with mother love, to cure him/her, to heal him/her, to strengthen him/her, to enliven him/her, and to send him/her full and speedy healing from Heaven, in all his/her limbs and all his/her organs, among all who are sick among our people. May s/he receive a healing of spirit and of body, now and without delay. We say: Amen.

2. El Na

אֵל נָא רְפָא נָא לַהּ׃

El na r'fa na lah.
Please, God, heal us.

(Numbers 12:13

Hebrew Glossary

Aninut	The in-between time between death and burial. A close loved one is called an *onen* or *onenet.*
Avelut	Period of mourning, beginning after burial. A close loved one is an *avel* or *avelah*.
Chevra Kadisha	Literally "the sacred society." This is a group, sometimes associated with a synagogue or a *landsmanshaft* or a region, that can oversee *taharah* and *shmirah*.
El Malei	The prayer that the deceased should rest in peace and be bound in the bonds of life.
Hesped	Literally "lamentation," this is the eulogy in which the deceased's life is described, kindly but honestly.
Ilui Neshamah	Literally "the raising up of the soul." This is the *kavanah* or intention of reciting *kaddish* for the prescribed time.
Kaddish	An Aramaic prayer of praise. It is recited numerous times during a prayer service, including at least one instance just for mourners. It has the rhythm of a heartbeat, but contains no mention of death.
Kri'ah	The tearing of one's clothes when a close loved one dies; replaced frequently by tearing a black ribbon worn on the clothing.
Matzevah	A memorial monument or gravestone.
Met / Metah	"The dead." This is how the deceased is referred to from the time of death until burial.
Shiv'ah	The 7-day mourning period beginning after the burial; also colloquially the condolence gatherings taking place during that period.
Sh'loshim	The 30-day mourning period from the time of the burial.
Shanah	The one-year cycle from the time of death, ending with the first *yahrzeit.*
Shmirah	Literally "guarding." This is the vigil held with the body of the *met / metah* prior to burial.
Taharah	The custom of washing the *met / metah* and dressing the body in a shroud in preparation for burial.

Yizkor	The memorial observance for first-degree relatives built into Yom Kippur as well as the closing days of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot.
Yahrzeit (Yortzayt)	The anniversary of one's death, tracked according to the Hebrew calendar.

Reading Suggestions

Anita Diamant, *Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead & Mourn as a Jew* (Schocken 1998)

Anne Brener, *Mourning & Mitzvah: A Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path Through Grief to Healing* (Jewish Lights 2017)

Rachel Barenblat, ed., *Beside Still Waters: A Journey of Comfort and Renewal* (Bayit Publications 2019)

Kerry Olitzky, *Grief in our Seasons: A Mourner's Kaddish Companion* (Jewish Lights 1998)

Rabbi Stuart Kelman and Dan Fendel, *Chesed Shel Emet: The Truest Act of Kindness (Exploring the Meaning of Taharah)* (EKS Publishing 2013)

Rabbi Stuart Kelman and Dan Fendel, *Nihum Aveilim: A Guide for the Comforter* (Sinai Memorial Chapel Chevra Kadisha and the Gamliel Institute 2015)

Jack Riemer and Nathaniel Stampfer, eds., *So that Your Values Live On: Ethical Wills and How to Prepare Them* (Jewish Lights 2010)

Simcha Paull Raphael, *Living and Dying in Ancient Times: Death, Burial, and Mourning in Biblical Tradition* (Albion Andalus 2015)

Organizations

Gamliel Institute: www.jewish-funerals.org

Kavod v'Nichum: kavodvnichum.org/

DA'AT Institute forDeath Awareness, Advocacy and Training: daatinstitute.net

Ner Shalom Cemetery Committee: nershalom.org/cemetery or (707) 664-8622

Pleasant Hills Cemetery: (707) 823-5042

Chevra Kadisha of Sonoma County: sonomajewishburial.org